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The CIA's new spymaster

President Reagan's new director of the CIA is as unlike the man he replaces as Milwaukee is unlike Marrakesh. William Casey, 73, was the oldest chief the agency ever had. Robert Gates, 43, will be its youngest. Casey, a freewheeling nonprofessional, cut his teeth in cloak-and-dagger work in World War II. Gates, a buttoned-down careerist and deskbound analyst, has never run a covert operation. Casey is fire; Gates is ice.

Yet Casey, hospitalized since December with cancer of the brain, favored Deputy Director Gates as his successor. Gates has shown a knack for pleasing a series of diverse bosses while remaining ideologically neutral. He is likely to win Senate confirmation easily and keep covert operatives on a shorter leash. Coldly efficient, he is a deft bureaucratic infighter who, says one ex-subordinate, "can cut your head off without your noticing."